Lessons from lockdown- working from home

Author: Nic Gildenhuys . May 2020

What I find interesting is that due to the lockdown situation we have been forced to allow people to work from home. I have recently done my first training intervention online using Zoom, something that I have always been sceptical about. Due to little preparation time, I am sure it was not ideal for the delegate and me but with time I could improve the experience. This brings me to the question as to why we have not embraced the technology earlier and have come to the following conclusions:

1. People's resistance to change blocks us from trying new technologies, even when the current way we do things is not ideal. In 1993 the technology organisations were saying that the paperless society was two to five years away. We still generate tons of paper because we can make notes file it away etc. all things that are available within the technology

2. There is still a belief that if people are not at work they will not be doing as much work as they are being paid for. Many organisations still measure input and do not have the systems in place to measure output. There are still many managers who believe that they need to see people control them and what work is being done.

3. There has not been a compelling reason to change from a business perspective, because we have been making a profit and in many cases, the business has been growing. Risk management has been required but most organisations went through the motions but very few took it seriously and invested in disaster management plans and business continuity plans. Several risk management plans that I have seen are paper tigers that are not practical. Many organisations do fire drills etc. but do they practice how the business would continue if we lost a warehouse or the production facility etc. When the situation is norma, do we allow people to work at home to find out what works and what does not work?

4. The labour laws of many countries also create problems for organisations where if the factory staff or the call centre staff have to be at work at 8 o'clock and leave at 5 o'clock then all other staff need to comply with the hours as it could result in a situation where the people who need to work onsite can then believe that they are being discriminated against. Furthermore, some Labour Laws limit the use of contractors forcing organisations to employ people to positions that do not merit full-time staff etc.

What can we change as a result of the situation we find ourselves in?

1. From an organisational perspective disaster management planning and business continuity plans need to be put in place followed by, practical proof of concept exercises, to ensure that lessons are learned when there is time and resources to learn and refine. The CEO of a large organisation, involved in large mining and construction equipment, in the United States told his management teams in 2007 to make plans as to what they would do if the organisation lost 50% of its income overnight. After the 2009 financial meltdown, the organisation grew at a % faster than Apple because they moved their business from predominantly selling equipment to

repairing the equipment, that the owners used to generate an income and could not afford to replace. I believe all organisations need to ask these difficult questions to be prepared for eventualities

2. An organisation need to develop robust performance management systems that concentrate on measuring output across divisions branches and individuals. I facilitate many workshops, on an annual basis and in many I ask the question whether the delegates find their performance management systems to be fair and motivational. In less than 10 % of the delegates do I get a positive answer? Most of the time the response is we cannot score more than average, and we do not know what is required to score above average. I believe that most of the PM systems are too complicated and do not motivate. Should we allow people to work from home or employ contractors to perform tasks that do not merit full-time employment we will need to implement performance management systems that:
   1. The organisation is clear what is the output that is required from the work to be done remotely.
   2. That the reward systems that need to change, to reward output within the boundaries of quality and cost.
   3. Technology would need to play a major part in the recording and reporting of output and quality.
   4. HR professionals will need to develop systems that cater for different job categories.
      1. The one contract for all workers will not be able to cater for the future. Contracts will need to be developed for different types of work and positions.
      2. One reward system will not be able to motivate and retain your human resources.
      3. How to measure disparate working conditions in one organisation.
      4. How to develop a policy of different working conditions, working in the office vs working at home etc.

3. Management training would need to train managers to:
   1. Set performance management objective and targets that will ensure that the organisation achieves its targets without trying to control and dictate. In many instances how the result is achieved, individual and management will not be able to control the process. What will be important is to ensure that the staff consider the risk when performing the tasks.
   2. How to conduct remote meetings but also to distribute information without relying on meetings. At the same time interactions will be reduced thus opportunities to coach and mentor will be limited and every opportunity would need to be utilised to its fullest potential.
   3. How to build trust and to be able to trust that the staff are doing what is expected of them and let the staff know that the management trusts that they are giving their best.
   4. Staff will need to be trained on analytical thinking, Risk assessment, management and business analysis as they will not be able to ask management for directions or speak to colleagues in the office next door etc. They would need to be equipped to think as though it is their own business and to consider every situation from the operational, financial, legal, reputational etc point of view.
   5. There will be requirements from our HR Professionals on how to manage the human need for interaction with others in an environment where such interaction will no longer be possible. How do we create the culture of "our organisation" if people are feeling remote

from the organisation? These are challenges that will require planning. Technology although it brings great tools, it can lead to social distancing.

4. Governing bodies, executive management etc. will in the future need to ensure that they are ready for "black swan events" and any disruptions. Stakeholders are going to require leaders to be prepared. After this event it would be interesting to see how many stakeholders are going to hold the people, who were supposed to lead organisations through good and bad times, accountable for not being prepared. This will entail:

   1. That leader prepare plans to protect organisations and stakeholders against adverse events but also to be ready to see opportunities, in a changing world, and that comes with these events. These plans need to be practical and implementable

   2. I believe that the expectations of the stakeholders will need to be realistic. I do not believe that in future shareholders can demand double-digit returns on equity, worker demand double-digit increases, suppliers charging excessive mark-ups etc. The expectations will refocus to sustainability within the constraints of society, environment, economic requirements etc. Future profits increase markups will be focused on moderate growth but ensuring sustainability for all stakeholders.

5. Organisations will need to develop:

   1. New processes, that will be able to be implemented at short notice, to manage adverse events. These processes need to be practised ensuring that all the new risks are identified and addressed e.g. the finance staff working at home are now more vulnerable to being forced to do illegal activities because they are not in a secure environment.

   2. Using technology, organisations would now be able to outsource jobs that would not have been feasible in the past, especially where there is not enough work to justify a fulltime position. E.g. receptionist can with technology manage several small organisations reception remotely. Payroll administrator can do payroll work for several organisations

   3. Individuals will need to prepare themselves for a new world where permanent employment may be replaced by contract employment and rewards will be based on output delivered. Thus, individuals will need to be skilled in entrepreneurial skills to sell themselves and their product.

What I have tried to say with the above is organisations will need to use this crisis to build new resilient organisations.

Nic Gildenhuys

(MAP) Wits Business School, Dip Project Management.

Nic has extensive experience in the banking industry. Although he has also been involved in a diverse range of other industries his primary focus centres on strategic management facilitation where he has extensive knowledge of the Balanced Scorecard. Coupled with this Nic has an excellent knowledge of business processes and process modelling tools. He also has a solid track record in project management where he has been highly successful in the development and delivery of numerous

successful training interventions. He has assisted several organisation in implementing Balanced scorecard and individual performance management, Risk management identification and assessment, process improvements and disaster and business continuity management.

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